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Bard

IESPOR

In the old days
where did you find a word?

so few looked for them even then

and fewer in the mouth.

Suppose you knew a word
but not what it meant..
Is it a word at all
and what kind of a word is that
a sound where there should be sense

is it a word because it can fit in
a sentence without breaking the mind's
ordinary grip on time?

In other words

is a word a word
because it holds a place
in the current of what can be said?

In a twenty word sentence one unknown word would make only a minor
puzzlement, unless it were the predicate or denouement of all.

Iesper is a word that came as dream.

It seemed as I got it to be strangely mute.

It reminded me of nothing.

Usually an unknown word has a smell or a hint
or a shimmer of resemblance.

Not *iespor* for me.

When I woke later it still seemed opaque in the moment of waking, of remembering it. When I began to be conscious and hold it in mind, a little waking, I felt what a few minutes later clearly remind me of *vespa* (wasp, or scooter), *hesper-* (the stem for western things), *vesper*, and then (from *-esp-*) the feeling of hope. Even Greek *elpis*, 'shield.' Why shield? The shield of hope. By now *iespor* was coming to remind me of things Celtic, *Hisperica famina*, that strange old book itself a farrago of unusual and nonce words. But what is *iespor*?

I saw it in Roman capitals in the dream,

IESPOR

look at it now as I'd look at a stone —

say this same pinkish beach stone from Cuttyhunk

I scried in last month. Still here on the table,

token of what to do with *iespor*,

Steve's old sacred advice

"look at [it] and remember."

Is it trying to keep clean by natural means

not soaping no scraping,

just *being* clean

is it planning a way to know

a new person,
something about the *chute de reins*
something about the gorge south of Thonon
and the flower growing in the cleft
right in my face as I climbed,
the flower whose name I could never remember?

I think it is a name from the beginning.

It may be the ship that brought us here at the beginning

it may be the ship that brought us strange merchandise

I think it was the name of the ship
that brought us language

a ship that sailed in out of the west.

What is iespor? But what is a ship?
River or sea? Sea or sky?
A ship is smaller than the body of space
through which it rides
and carries something inside it
different from itself, a ship has purpose —
that is a ship.

Doesn't iespor sound like that? And doesn't it sound too (or look too, I see it, in fact this is the first thing I saw) like the title, printed nobly in Caslon or well-spaced Baskerville, I E S P O R , on wide cream sheets, title of a provincial

scholarly periodical published in the West of England in the Nineteenth Century, early or middle, concerned with local antiquities, Pictish remains, Roman ruins, Druids and dolmens and Gypsy lore? I see an issue before me, learned articles by clergymen and Cambridge M.A.'s. I see a discussion on aber as an element in place names. An attack on the pretensions of the 'British Israelites.' An account of what was found, bones and such, excavating a tunnel for a new branch line. A list of Cornish words connected with the sea. I have read such issues all my life, interested, excited, frustrated all the time. Everybody has an explanation. Everybody remembers. But nobody knows.

I think, though, that Iespor knows.

Iespor is not the name of a mistake.

It is exciting, and frustrating, this thing behind the word, the word I'm given.

We could be like theologians now, apply the apophatic method, *via negativa*, try to define God by what God isn't, make assertions of what God is not, leaving when all is said and done a space inside which God must be, remnant, last of all, the unexcludable, because unsayable, fact.

So think off the top of the head (the only place where wisdom's stored), think of what iespor is likely not to be or not to mean.

Iespor is not a girl. Not a woman. Not an animal. Not a machine, I think.

Could it be a time of day, a rock on a hill, the hill to the west of us, with a cloaked travelers idling down? But there is no hill west of us, just a fall of land though dark hemlock woods to the river. A stream, the Metambesen, runs down

through the trees, and has made a cleft to run through, and three cataracts before it loses its sense of itself in the North River. Could Iespor be an old stream, a stream running through another, or underneath the earth, a stream that comes to light the way a person you haven't thought of for twenty years comes to mind?

I want to think a way to find a word
when the word itself
comes from 'inside'
— the strange name we give to what we simply know
without anyone telling us or showing

why call it inside?
Are my thoughts inside me?
Aren't we really inside them,
the 'ground' of their discharge?

A self is where the thoughts take form, and it falsely supposes
itself to be someone because things are happening where it is.

There used to be a delicious old symbol of 'ground' used in electric circuit
diagrams. Have they gone the way of slide rules and Morse code?

Am I the ground?

Is iespor a code?

Is it *notariqon*? Intellectuals eliminate sexual problems originally romantic.

Or *gematria*? What number does it reach? If we spell it rpsy, it amounts to 350, which is the number likewise of *ShKL*, the Intellect *lkc* , and *SPIR*, a sapphire (Ex. xxviii. 18). ryps.

And when Charlotte wakes later and hears my dream word, she at once says, it's *espoir*, sideways, French for 'hope.' And then she says it sounds like 'diaspora.' And I remember that I've been reading the first book of Doughty's *The Dawn in Britain*, on the diaspora of the Gaulish tribes — combining Charlotte's sense of the word and my suspicion of Celtic glimmerings.

Later I look online through search engines, and I find Iespor indeed, trademark of a Turkish pharmaceutical company's brand of lidocaine, which is the same as old xylocaine, the local anesthetic so much of which over the years landed in my jaws.

And an hour after that, as we're cleaning out the back room, Charlotte finds something I've had for thirty years, without ever acquiring it, one of the things that is simply there in a house: a pack of Dr Rhine's test cards from Duke University, with which he carried out those once famous experiments in ESP.

We sit a while and play with them. I seem to be a good sender, and she seems to be a good receiver. I wonder why I have these cards, who gave them to me. They don't even prompt the story of their own becoming. Which is the only story we really need to tell. The responsibility. The slender witness hiding in the trees of all our life.

And I think we are only in the dawn of the word.

13 August 2002

THE BIRD OF HOLY LOVE

28. And about the bird "Of holy love" which [they call] the bird *Zor-bara Vohuman*, as also the holy bird, one says, "An Avesta is assigned in its tongue; when it speaks the devs flee from it and [do] not [keep] their abode thither. [It prepares its abode in the desert, and remains in non-Iranian districts, for this reason that the devs cannot] hold [their abode thither]."

29. And the devs and the sorcerers seize the nail paring when one has not recited the incantation over it, and dart it like an arrow at that bird and kill it.

30. That bird seizes and devours the nail paring when one has not recited the incantation over it, for this reason that the devs [and the sorcerers] cannot utilise it. When the incantation is recited it does not devour it and the devs can [not] commit sin therewith.

from *the Greater Bundahisn*

I found this

and it is like a fingernail paring found

or anything else on the ground you find

it is there

it seems to be always waiting for something else

nothing is complete

it is a cape sticking into the ocean

it is wild cold salt

and nobody knows

every rock needs its ocean its bird shadow passing overhead

I found this and it is there

a famous bird

at least it has a name

is waiting to change things around

a name changes everything

and everything that exists

has to have an opposite,

each one comes into the world to block the other

which comes first?

a beast comes to contradict
the ungodly appetite in composite things

there are so many

name a disease by what beast can cure it
this is a disease only fox can remedy

but the disease that is the wolf is the whole world,
this is what the old book said,
the world is a wolf and the wolf must kill

and no one comes to kill the wolf
and yet we live

that is the story of the sun's religion, the light
it accidentally let fall, lets fall,

it said 102° today in our town, how much is that
in feathers of the holy bird, in bristles of the fox?

13 August 2002

GETTING READY TO FACE THE GYPSY

1.

Let the picture blow into your mind,
they tell you what you need to hear,
a cyclist weaving through sycamores,
woman calling for a rendezvous.

And all of it will happen
and none of it will mean

not what you want it to mean.

Next day you'll go
find another gypsy
or find another mind
for her to read.

Everything is waiting for you now.

2.

Picture writing.

Skins. Walls
we built.

A mark or two
to make it mine.

We didn't always call them gypsies.
We didn't always know how to read.

But the pictures were always there,
an interminable miracle
so much arising to be said.

I am the rune
you to read.

3.

You can't say anything about everything.
Only the gypsy can, that hedonist
who smears your images
all over her mind
 and reads them to you
with her fingers stroking your pulse your palm,

she is almost a parasite
of your prayers,
 she flies with you
from the dream mountain you
spend every night climbing.

You send me cards from ski resorts
in obscure valleys, you tell me
of wounded revelers weeping
by roaring fires, you tell me
of the strange colors of the light
through tear-stained eyelashes, all of that,
I try to read them, now,
spread out on my lap.

4.

Not a gypsy,
not an angel. Not an angel.
Some girl I went to school with,
signature in my album, she said
Forget me not but I did.
Only now in me, faceless
and terrible and living and close
suddenly it begins to remember.

14 August 2002

JOURNEY

More words peeling off the pale hot sky.

Will there be another

when I've forgotten this one.

Sky behind sky behind sky.

No relief from dream.

14 August 2002

ORIGINS

dead leaf between
deck planks
another caught
still green

any
thing you want
I bring you
marigolds and ice

say it and it's yours.

14 August 2002

ATTACK OF THE FIFTY FOOT WOMAN

up there on the screen, to you, she comes
at the cost of substance.

The only meat
is yours, beholder. Your body
is her garden of remorse, the thorns of pleasure
know you in the dark.

While she, the bodiless,
intuits your dream
so clearly because she is nobody,
hence yours, you miserable
statistic of me, abstract I, prime unmover
moved.

The world is the thickness of what you thought.
Condensate of desire. So spoke the Arab
in this dream the big girl woke me from
flaring on the movie wall, and she
in her surfer's smile was the image of Philosophy
whom once they chose to guide my life,
Kant behind Hegel, a well below the rain.

2.

A friend says Polish has a word, *jawa*, that means
'the waking state' of men and beasts, *na jawie* means
in a state of being awake, easy as we can say in dream.
But is it blue? It's black.

It's a dream still
when the lights come on, the woman's voice
gets higher and leaner till it vanishes
in the attic, a hot day, empty floorboards,

why am I trying so hard to remember?

3.

She falters because she is an image,
and in the day of judgment every image
will be summoned before its maker
and told “be alive!” and if it cannot live
then the master of the day of judgment
smites both image and its maker
with a dark shame and a forgetting

and the world has to happen all over again
they say.

I say if you wake up with an image
the day is slain already,
mute in its service
we palter on the steps of an endless house,
Piranesi's staircases, never wake up, every
building in the world fits inside this building
and no room in its but is on its way
to one more room.

4.

I grew up in a railroad flat
only the bathroom had a door that closed,
no abiding, only going, living on a road
in a sparse country, often alone
but never private. Language
was the name of the interruptions,
and language the elixir to heal,
and writing softly in some corner
was a quiet wind to lift, to hide.

For writing is the address of the absent,
cannot flourish in a peopled space
without the enclosing discipline.
You are the room.

Language uncoils
inside you. Nobody sees,
nobody knows. And then the house breaks
and the war is over, the street
walks in the window, and you come home
at last, the guy left over from the beginning.
Before either of us knows it,
you're me again, you plausible impostor.
And time is happening again.

5.

Forget
the giant woman, the chartless house.
The sea wind came up the street
but did not turn in the door,
the house did not open on the south
where the sea marsh was.

Forget the hot nights.
The machine runs simple now. Oil.
Lube. Filter. Gas. The process
is complete, none of it makes sense.
Think about something else.
This 'else' is what you called Philosophy,
whose thoughts are honed and clear,
and fit together till the light's shut out
and we get excited in the dark, shutterbugs
in paradise among the chemicals

turning all that exists into one neat idea
in a ruddy glow like the devil's cigar.

I have been there too, I signed the member's card,
today is Mary's feast day when she rose
unimpeded through the turbulence of light
and was flesh in heaven. From the dark
of notion to the flare of your actual body
standing over the world, is that real distance
or the same vague mile again, a word
and its shadow,

a little boy lying to his pillow?

Only what has never been the case
can be tomorrow.

I have tried so hard
to be good and all I really want is more.

15 August 2002

SAVOIR FAIRE

Chances. Waiting.

Endurance. Tent,

you pitch a tent

a roof a sale

a softball a ship

you pitch woo,

you carry things

around the house

you carry a disease

from a new country

to an old

there is no end of what

you know how to do,

things dissolve in you

and come again,

even with all the people in the town

there are more doings than people to do them

so it's up to you, it's all up to you.

Which is why I send you this reminder.

I know you'd rather lie there on your chaise

having your friends work plump wet

grapes slowly through your lips while you read

Architectural Digest in the rain

but this is serious. You have to verb

until every human work is done.

After that you can play with your nice machine.

16 August 2002

PLAY SPACE

Means room for more.

Anthem of the blue marines
with pretty wings.

A breeze
happens, and different clouds.
It looks a different earth.

The change. Learning
is a thing. Walking
is a way we used to do
from one town to another.
From Barrytown to Cedar Hill
and on to Annandale
by Margaret's Well, locust trees
give way to pine, hemlocks
crowd the road.

And recede.
Everything yields.
The sentence of the land we steadily
pronounce.

Childhood
memories walk me all my lives.

Reaches for and mostly falls.
One word
to say them all.
Different cloud. Different hours.
The numbers of it
decode a different person in me
to experience

the shuddering of time.

One word to say them all.

And then the cards, fall open
always to the Queen of Hearts
that miracle of letting the wasp
walk all the way into the honey jar

the gleaming marble coping of her well.

Waiting period. The pregnancies.

A silver paten, with letters all about:

he made the fruit that hangs down from the vine

the fruit that hands itself to me
when I hear you speaking. When you are near.

Breakbone anxiety. A temple
of the living god. Morning.

'The caravan seems ready to depart
and I have still not sold my salt

and I only want to sell to you. And still
I have no set my seed. So many Christians,
so few opals.

I sit down in the shade
and try to read my mind. The brain-
mouth barrier falls. The words
spill out like a torn sack of grain

but I learn nothing. Teach me
what I mean.

The mind's away
on business for the Lodge, seamen

call from the sands, horses holler.

There is a new kind of sky
in other words
and you have come to me again
speaking the one
word that says them all,

there is a shadow like a voice
stuns the nursery,
the games are all finished
only the game is left,

whatever you're playing at this moment
you'll play for the rest of your life.

16 August 2002